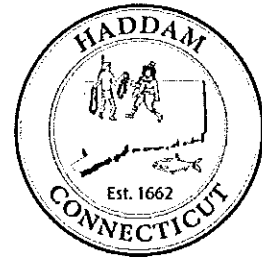


Town of Haddam

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**TO: Sen. Steve Cassano and Rep. Ed Jutila, Chairmen,
And the Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee**

Testimony on H.B. No. 6998
AAC THE CONVEYANCE OF CERTAIN PARCELS OF STATE LAND.
Monday, March 16, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.

As the first selectman of Haddam and past founder and executive director of Citizens for the Protection of Public Land, I have experience with the conveyance bill process and have reservations about a few sections of HB 6998 as well as concern over the short window of time to review the bill and research the proposals.

Due to the complicatedly political and controversial Haddam Land Swap the State Lands Working Group was formed to find better ways to protect state conservation land and to bring more clarity to the conveyance acts. Their task is to make sure there is a better process to prevent bills such as HB6998 from getting this far before thorough vetting is complete.

I hope they will have the opportunity to assist you, especially during the busy legislative session, to make sure these conveyances are fair, honest, legal, and open for proper investigation.

I have not had time to review all of the proposed transfers due to the short time period but some leave many questions after preliminary research. I would also like to inquire if this has been vetted by the Office of Fiscal Analysis?

While I won't get into lengthy specifics of each section, I'll leave that to the environmental and land experts, but a few stand out as questionable.

Section 3: Property in Milford under the custody of DEEP; two are less than an acre and one is 3.51 acres. The proposed uses are: "municipal purposes, including to ensure public access to open space and to the Milford Animal Control Shelter, to mitigate parking demand, to promote public health and safety by ensuring emergency access and to create coastal retreat areas to enhance storm resiliency." I don't know much about this area except I was given some detail by Eric Hammerling at CFPA:

"... would convey 4+ acres of Silver Sands State Park to the town of Milford for "municipal purposes" and the price of \$0. DEEP had previously refused the town's request to establish an exclusive parking area only for town residents, and so the town asked for the areas in question to be taken from Silver

Sands and be given to Milford. Silver Sands is one of the state's most beautiful beaches, and has been the beneficiary of millions of dollars of rehabilitation work utilizing state funds over the past few years."

This seems a little unfair and disingenuous for the steward (DEEP) of the property to deny the request for state park land to be taken for a parking lot and then have the legislature overturn that decision in a conveyance bill.

Section 8: would convey over 100 acres of the Centennial Watershed Forest to the town of Fairfield for \$0. DEEP owns the land; Aquarion Water Company apparently holds conservation easements on this property; The Nature Conservancy works in partnership with DEEP and Aquarion on the land management of the Centennial Watershed Forest. Reportedly, none of these parties were given notice of the conveyance. *From personal experience, I believe all proposed conveyances should be prominently noticed locally.*

Section 12: concerns 7.29 acres in Portland to be conveyed from DOT to the town. There is no description of what's there now. This section is lacking detail and needs further explanation.

Section 13: conveys eight DOT parcels (about 10 acres) to East Hartford for "development." When there is no information on the present condition and uses of a property, or specific information on what is planned for it, the public and most legislators have no way of knowing whether a conveyance is prudent and ethical or not.

Section 14: (*Mining Operations*) are highly questionable due to the impact on land and natural resources. Mining operations can be disastrous for the environment and to what extent will the public be compensated for allowing a for-profit private corporation to benefit from the use of state land? I do not believe the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection is in the mining business and would neither encourage the "washing of earthen material" in the nearby Quinebaug River nor the "accessing said river for the diversion of water" on its property.

Section 15: the DEEP would be granting another easement to a for-profit mining company (for a whopping \$20,000?) and would gift their stripped land to the state, only AFTER they have removed all the material. How is this a positive tradeoff?

The DEEP, legislature and people of our small and humble state have a duty to protect our natural resources and not make trades to for-profit corporations at the expense of the environment or public lands. This is both short-sighted and would be a major setback for our goal of preserving our waterways and state lands.

Thank you for your attention to these important questions and considerations,



Melissa J. Schlag
First Selectman
Haddam